The Weird: A Dis/Orientation

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For nearly a century 'weird fiction', if it exists at all, has been a fugitive category, a blur in the corner of other genres. Unhappy and interstitial, it was usually abjected as the lowest form of culture in the explosion of the mass magazine pulps that emerged, crested and vanished between 1890 and 1945. Virtually the only recognisable name to crawl from these swamps was H. P. Lovecraft, but his strange success has been almost entirely posthumous, and was initially confined to a cult following in the outré world of gross-out horror.

This situation has profoundly changed in the twenty-first century. Writers associated with the 'New Weird', such as M. John Harrison and China Miéville, are lauded for their genre-blending. Old Weird writers – such as Lord Dunsany and Arthur Machen – have been ascribed Penguin Classic status, whilst a vibrant small press culture reissues many 'lost' classics, a trend now picked up by more mainstream publishers like the NYRB Classics series.[1] There is a whole school of philosophy, sometimes called 'weird realism', that displaces phenomenology of Husserl with Lovecraft, creating a (non-)philosophy of horror. Ecocriticism has been thoroughly weirded. There is even a 'Weird Wave' of contemporary film, primarily associated with the Greek film-makers Yorgos Lanthimos and Athina Rachel Tsangari, although symptomatically some doubt the existence of a single wave.[2] This is to say nothing of the rising influence of the weird on mainstream TV and cinema, from the tentacular sublime of Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* (2012)

to the mutterings about cosmic horror and references to Robert Chambers's obscure 1890s horror fiction *The King in Yellow* in the first TV series of *True Detective* (2014) or the retro-slime of *Stranger Things* (2016).

Readers new to this subterranean world may need some orientation. This is the aim of this special issue of *Textual Practice,* with essays ranging across the genre from the turn of the twentieth century to the turn of the twenty-first. This first essay is intended as an act of survey, or, in the end, anti-survey, since what soon becomes clear for the act of introduction is the recalcitrance of texts that might be fixed as 'Weird'. I want to acknowledge the difficulty and elusiveness of the weird, a genre that dissolves generic glue, a category that defies categorisation, and that by definition escapes the containment of the act of 'introduction.' The weird reveals the best iterations of itself in the way it *dis*orients any simple route map through the territory. Let's start by weaving a narrative that will need to be steadily unpicked.

The Straight Story

Naming: it ought to be a simple starting point. In March 1923, proprietor Clark Henneberger joined the burgeoning American pulp magazine market in fantastic stories with *Weird Tales,* subtitled 'A Magazine of the Bizarre and Unusual.' It was in the generic pulp format pioneered by Frank Munsey in *Argosy* in 1896*,* with 128 pages of rough, untrimmed pulp paper with bright, lurid covers. The first edition included Anthony Rud's exemplary tale, 'Ooze', a story of a scientist's backwoods experiment with protozoan matter that produces a giant amoeboid thing that promptly eats his family. The story was so unsure of its generic status

that it contained a reflection on 'the pseudo-scientific story': 'In plain words, this means a yarn, based upon solid fact in the field of astronomy, chemistry, anthropology or whatnot, which carries to a logical conclusion unproved theories of men who devote their lives to searching out further nadirs of fact.'[3]

The proffered definition was close to the formulations being tried out by Hugo Gernsback, who developed the term 'scientifiction' in his new journal *Amazing Stories* in 1926, simplified to 'science fiction' three years later. Both Gernsback's *Amazing* and Henneberger's *Weird Tales* appealed to the same literary forebears: Poe, Verne and Wells. Gernsback reprinted and serialised their stories, whilst readers of *Weird Tales* early on demanded 'more pseudo-scientific stories and more H. G. Wells stories.'[4] Poe worked to evoke atmospheres that he explicitly called 'weird'; Wells incorporated these elements into his self-conscious development of the 'scientific romance' in the 1890s (the epithet 'weird' occurs several times in *The Time Machine,* for instance, the Morlocks described as 'weird and horrible')[5].

Weird Tales was not science fiction, however, and never became so. It was also not just a continuation of the late Victorian Gothic revival, but a mutation of it: something on the way to modern horror, which had not quite coalesced. The magazine promised on its front page 'A Wealth of Startling Thrill-Tales' and crossed into the territory of 'weird menace' typical of the so-called 'shudder pulps' that mixed up hard-boiled detective fiction, way-out Westerns and sadistic sexual torture.[6]

A typical early issue of *Weird Tales* veered between these modes. After thirteen issues a new editor was installed, and Farnsworth Wright developed writers that created a niche for the magazine, including Robert E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, and Seabury Quinn. In the 1930s, the successor editor Dorothy McIlwraith brought Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, C. L. Moore and Fritz Lieber into *Weird Tales.*

In 1925, Lovecraft composed the long essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature,* in which he defined the weird as 'a literature of cosmic fear.'[7] This reached beyond the standard narratives and tropes of the Gothic, Lovecraft explained:

> The true weird tale must have something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain – a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space.[8]

Lovecraft established a lineage of the weird, beginning with the English and German Gothic romance, leading through Poe to Ambrose Bierce. His Anglophilia determined that the four 'modern masters' of the weird form were Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, M. R. James and Lord Dunsany. Whilst these

figures wrote in the Gothic or fantasy tradition, the latter part of Lovecraft's definition tacked away from theological terrors and towards scientific naturalism more typical of Wells, in which horror derives not from theological fears but what Lovecraft elsewhere termed the 'cosmic indifference' of a universe expanded inconceivably in time and space by scientific discovery in the nineteenth century, and which dethroned anthropocentric conceptions of the world. Because Lovecraft insisted that the weird was an effect of 'atmosphere', a '*vivid depiction of a certain type of human mood'*, it was never tied to a fixed typology and continually slipped category. [9]

When Lovecraft died in 1937, he had only one very limited edition book publication outside reams of amateur press and pulp magazine publications and so seemed destined for obscurity. His dedicated followers tried to pitch story collections to New York publishers, but none were interested. Two devotees, August Derleth and Donald Wandrei founded Arkham House to publish Lovecraft short stories, starting with *The Outsider and others* in 1939. When the eminent literary critic Edmund Wilson deigned to notice these volumes, he dismissed the developing cult of Lovecraft with the damning view that 'the only real horror of most of these fictions is the horror of bad taste and bad art.'[10]

The weird then sank lower into the twilight territory of horror comics, with titles like *Weird Chills, Weird Horrors, Weird Science, Weird Tales of the Future,* a boom that began in 1949 and was abruptly curtailed by a moral panic and self-censorship in 1954. It took the 1960s counter-culture to reanimate Lovecraft, with paperback editions that inspired horror movies (although Roger Corman's

early B-movie adaptation of Lovecraft's story 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward' was presented as 'Edgar Allan Poe's *The Haunted Palace*'), terrible psychedelic bands, hippy religions that began to worship Cthulhu, and a vast elaboration of Lovecraft's mythos of monstrous Elder Ones.[11] The Cult of Cthulhu has been growing uncontainably ever since, like Japanese knot-weed, first cultivated amongst horror fans before exploding into the mainstream, with T-shirts, Elder One plushies, and slithery block-buster films made for hundreds of millions of dollars. Horror fiction in the Lovecraftian mode continues into the contemporary era with authors like Thomas Ligotti and Laird Barron. There have been fascinating attempts to continue to write in Lovecraft's mode while trying to revision his ghastly racial politics in novels like Matt Ruff's *Lovecraft Country* and Victor Lavalle's *The Ballad of Black Tom* (both 2016).[12]

As a literary form cherished beyond a small coterie, it has only been since 2003, when the British writer M. John Harrison coined the term the New Weird, that the term has come to be revalued. Harrison had in mind a cluster of authors seeking to defy the relatively identifiable markers of science fiction, Gothic, horror or fantasy to create something hybrid, slippery and new. Harrison was tentative about the New Weird, posing it as a series of questions rather than an identifiable kind of writing: 'Who does it? What is it? Is it even anything?'[13] After China Miéville issued a manifesto for the New Weird in the same year, both he and Harrison promptly tried to move away from the term, fearing ossification. Yet it travelled back across the Atlantic, and the anthology *The New Weird* appeared in America in 2008. In an exercise of retrofitting a literary tradition for this now very contemporary genre, the same editors produced a vast anthology,

The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories in 2011, which steered away from pulp origins and invented roots in early twentieth century Modernism, incorporating figures as diverse as Franz Kafka, Gustav Meyrink, Jorge Luis Borges, Rabindranath Tagore and Stefan Grabinski. The weird had wormed its way into the vitals of world literature at last.

Inventing/Evading tradition

As Eric Hobsbawm observed long ago, the invention of tradition legitimates by fabricating continuity with an august past.[14] Retroactive invention of literary origins is typical of the weird's anxious self-fashioning. Lovecraft's *Supernatural Horror in Literature* shaped his own literary influences into a distinct lineage, although his definition of 'cosmic horror' bears little relation to the actual use of the epithet 'weird' in Victorian and Edwardian literary useage. 'Weird' was used to describe a certain tonality of the fiction of Poe or Edward Bulwer-Lytton in the 1840s, before becoming a common epithet to describe collections of 'strange' or 'not quite Gothic' fiction in the 1880s, but also helped name uncategorisable exotic fictions from the colonial margin by Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling or Bertram Mitford. Lovecraft, ignoring much of this usage, was inventing his own tradition.

We can tell the straight story of 'weird fiction' only provided we grasp its provisional nature and resist the idea that the weird is an established but somehow 'lost' tradition simply waiting to be uncovered. It is not actually there, or only spectrally so. It is better to think of the weird as an inflection or tone, a *mode* rather than a *genre,* as Veronica Hollinger puts it, 'not a *kind* but a *method,*

a way of getting something done' that exists in the interstices of other forms.[15] This builds on Istvan Csicsery-Ronay's rebuff to genre criticism that always gets stuck policing the borders of static, structural definitions. In his case, Csicsery-Ronay moves from the genre of science fiction to the mode of *science fictionality*, 'neither a belief nor a model, but rather a mood or attitude, a way of entertaining incongruous experiences, in which judgment is suspended.'[16] Reading instead for this open, dynamic, undetermined set of possibilities is a productive method to transfer to the weird.

Different readers discern different wave-forms of the weird. In a comment at the end of the *Weird Compendium*, China Miéville challenges the notion that there can be a weird canon: 'This canon changes. Its edges are protean, its membranes as permeable and oozing as the breaching biology of Lovecraft's Dunwich Horror.'[17] Weird connoisseurs are in fact constitutionally resistant to canon-formation, valuing instead the obscure, the forgotten, the overlooked. It is the quintessential mode of the minor writer: for every list, there is a secret list, an addendum of the lost, the disappeared, the damned.

Take Arthur Machen, whose early fame rested on his contribution to the Decadent Keynotes series in 1894 with *The Great God Pan and The Inmost Light* and the sacrilegious *The Three Impostors* the following year, books received as poisonous and blasphemous and which became caught up by association in the scandal of Oscar Wilde's arrest and imprisonment. After these provocations, Machen is often depicted as embracing a life of obscurity, those margins where the minor writer ekes out an existence in jobbing journalism or hack writing,

surfacing occasionally with a modest masterpiece all the more valued by adepts for its sheer obscurity and unobtainability. Machen repeatedly mythologized his poverty and marginal existence in later works, writing the novel *The Hill of Dreams* (a book about writer's block) and the autobiography, *Far Off Things,* which recounted his failed apprenticeship in writing in the 1880s. Machen even published a selection of his worst reviews, called *Precious Balms,* as a celebration of his aesthetic 'failure.' For Iain Sinclair, the writer who has built a career out of recovering the forgotten denizens of London's 'ghetto of the weird', Machen is one of London's 'shadowy immanences' [18] Sinclair revels in the para-literary world of London's second-hand book dealers, where the pulp fiction promised something magical and rare beyond 'orthodox bibliography' but with all that hermetic wisdom slowly rotting back into wood-mulch: Machen is his exemplum.

There is a paradox, though, in Machen's success as a legendary failure, his major presence as a minor writer, read not just in rare second-hand paperbacks and limited small press editions, but now in Penguin Classics. The English weird, with its strong associations with the Decadent movement, can be seen as part of a reaction to the commerce of literature as industry, resistant to easily consumable 'light' reading of new mass circulation magazines of the 1880s.[19] It is a low literature that seeks an alliance with high culture in a war against the bland pervasiveness of the middle-brow. In reaction, the weird seeks crabbed, difficult prose, transgressive or evasive content, genre slippage and elusive authors as emblems of aesthetic resistance to the market. This search has if anything intensified in the later stages of the conglomeration of multinational publishing houses. Lavish small press reprints of the weird (such as those issued by

Tartarus Press in the UK and Hippocampus Press in the US) emerge in dialectical relation to the behemoths of Random House and Amazon.

If Machen's rarefied weird stories risk being coarsened by mass production (an Oxford World's Classics edition is soon to follow), there is always someone more obscure to pursue. There are the fungal fantasies of Edwardian horror writer William Hope Hodgson, say, or Richard Marsh's mysterious life and manic over-production of horrors in the late Victorian and early Edwardian age. Once vanishingly obscure, small presses have recovered both writers, and academic scholarship has followed.[20] The Decadent poet, Count Stenbock, author of *Studies in Death* (1894), published shortly before his early death from alcohol and opium addition remains more safely obscure, for the moment. Stenbock, who died with only a handful of delicate and perverse publications, and was cherished by perverse Decadents like Arthur Symons, has been the subject of Jeremy Reed's study, *A Hundred Years of Disappearance,* and remains a far greater success at failure than Machen. The weird must constantly reinscribe just where its margin lies, since what is valued as obscure is an inevitably moveable feast.

Pseudobiblia

Even worse for any straight story, however, weird fiction offers a highly self-conscious meta-commentary on the construction of textual forebears, because it is a genre marked by *pseudobiblia*, the invention of fake books, fake libraries and fake traditions. This was a habit of Arthur Machen, who started out as a bibliographer, rare bookseller and translator, who wrote *The Three Impostors* to

bring into existence a long-rumoured but probably non-existent sacrilegious book.

It also dominates the career of M. R. James, who was after all a leading scholar on Biblical apocrypha, the marginalia of the Christian tradition removed from Biblical canonicity over doubts about their authenticity and thus their authority. James's ghosts are emanations of dusty manuscripts, conjured out of the leaves of fake books, plausible-sounding but entirely fabricated tractates with library classmarks, commonplace books in private libraries, or incunabula left to moulder in cathedral precincts. In his academic career, James documented *pseudoepigraphia*, falsely titled or incorrectly ascribed texts, and the lovely paradoxical class of *agrapha*, a term used, as James defined it, 'to designate sayings and traditions of Christ that are not recorded in our Gospels, and are not capable of being traced to their source.' [21] This tissue of real and fake texts drives many of his short stories, composed in the fustian tones of the laboured academic or antiquarian. The *Sertum Steinfeldense Norbertinum,* published in Cologne in 1712 by Christian Albert Erhard, sounds real – although it is fake – because it is clustered by James with real books that sound fake like the seventh century *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* or Gustavus Selenus's *Cryptographia.* The Tractate Middoth has a fake Cambridge University Library class-mark, but the manuscripts ordered from the British Museum Manuscript room in 'Casting the Runes' have a real classmark, Harley 3586, a collection of monastic registers that James himself had consulted.[22] Never trust books, manuscripts or archivists in M. R. James.

This habit of bringing imaginary books into concrete existence was fostered in Lovecraft's circle too. Lovecraft's *Necronomicon* was a fictitious Arabic grimoire composited by 'the mad Arab Abdul Al-Hazrad'. It was first mentioned by Lovecraft in passing in 1922, but by 1927 it had acquired an elaborate history of circulation and publication in Lovecraft's mock-bibliographic entry on the fatal book, 'The History of the *Necronomicon.*' Lovecraft passed the habit of creating 'terrible and forbidden books' on to his circle of friends. Clark Ashton Smith invoked the awful *Book of Eibon,* Robert E. Howard dipped in to the terrifying *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* by Friedrich von Junzt (translated from the German as *Unspeakable Cults,* although the invented German was not strictly accurate) and Robert Bloch referred to *De Vermis Mysteriis, The Mysteries of the Worm,* supposedly a late fifteenth-century grimoire written by the alchemist and necromancer Ludwig Prinn, who was burnt at the stake in Brussels after a witch trial that established his uncanny and unholy age. The line between 'real' and 'fake' grimoires is often impossible to determine anyway, given their long history of fabrication, plagiarism, and hoax.[23] As a series of in-jokes, Lovecraft's circle then began to refer to each others' fake texts in their fiction, giving them a weird sort of extra-textual glamour that wasn't always entirely in their control.

Towards the end of his life, Lovecraft responded in a letter to an earnest seeker that the *Necronomicon* was 'purely imaginary.'

> As for seriously written books on dark, occult and supernatural themes – in all truth they don't amount to much... Any good fiction-writer can think

> up “records of primal horror” which surpass in imaginative force any occult production which has sprung from genuine credulousness.[24]

However, the afterlife of these pseudobiblia has been a story of a strange coming into actual existence. The *Necronomicon* now does exist as a book, and has done so since at least 1969. The *School Library Journal* warned fellow librarians of this peculiar effect in order to stave off the risk of suffering what is rather evocatively called ‘reference trauma’.[25] A librarian has dismissed a lunatic inquiry about the imaginary *Necronomicon,* only to be ‘confronted with evidence that several Virginia libraries claimed to own copies edited by L. K. Barnes.’[26] All copies of this edition, however, have disappeared from their libraries, leading to the suspicion that this is a phantom catalogue entry, an arcane cataloguer’s joke. But there *is* an Avon paperback edition, published in 1969, released in the first rush of the counter-cultural Lovecraft revival. A slim volume, this can only be a selection from a book that Lovecraft suggests in ‘The Dunwich Horror’ is at least 750 pages long. Sure enough, published versions of the *Necronomicon,* both real fakes and fake real editions, have proliferated. In horror films, the *Necronomicon* is at the core of the demonic goings on in the cabin in the woods in the *Evil Dead* films (just as Clark Ashton Smith’s *Book of Eibon* is glimpsed at the beginning of Lucio Fulci’s nasty horror about a hotel over a portal into hell, *The Beyond*). There is even something called the *Pseudonomicon,* advertising its apocryphal meta-fakeness in its very title.[27] ‘Don’t be surprised,’ the *School Library Journal* advises, ‘if some time a student asks you for enrolment information on Miskatonic University, which Lovecraft claimed possessed one of the six

remaining copies of the *Necronomicon.* And, don't try to Inter-Library Loan it from them.'[28]

Pseudobiblia is at the core of the weird archive. Its odd 'tendency to grow posthumously' is linked, Leif Sorensen thinks, to its marginal pulp status, because 'they lack the kind of institutional standing that renders an archive official or legitimate.'[29] Out on the edges of the literary archive, weird fiction generates its own 'archive fever', hallucinating into existence phantoms of the catalogue that thumb their noses at the *archons,* the patriarchal authorities who guard the house of official documents.[30] Weird fiction writes its own literary forebears into existence, often in the very texture of its fictional worlds. Ambrose Bierce created stories out of plots or phrases suggested by Edgar Allan Poe. Robert Chambers' *The King in Yellow* composes fragments of its fatal book from tiny echoes of Beirce, and Lovecraft defers to a whole tradition of the weird, something emerging at a tangent from standard histories of the Gothic romance. Later on, the act of building an archive of fugitive weird literature, chasing down those last sources, becomes an occasion for horror. Robert Bloch wrote a short story 'The Man Who Collected Poe' in 1951. Sixty years later, Mark Samuels published a homage in 'The Man Who Collected Machen'.[31] The bibliographic compulsion folds back on itself to become a demonic force: the weird is always already a recursive meta-weird.

The Weird Veers

If it is getting steadily harder to tell the straight story, there is another catch rooted in the word itself. The meaning of 'weird' typically evokes notions of

doom or the dread power of Fate, but Timothy Morton notes that 'weird' derives from the Old Norse *'urth,* meaning twisted, *in a loop.'* There is no straight story because this is 'knowing in a loop – a *weird* knowing.'[32] The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that there is also a cluster of meanings that associates 'weïrd' (with a diaeresis) with 'weyard' or 'wayward'. This association was developed from Shakespeare's punning around the 'Weird Sisters' in *Macbeth,* a text whose supernatural forces influenced the iconography of the eighteenth-century Gothic revival. The weird means 'suggestive of the supernatural; of a mysterious or unearthly character', but it also carries the sense of 'out of the ordinary course, strange, unusual; hence, odd, fantastic.' It resonates with *wayward,* 'disposed to go counter to the wishes or advice of others, or to what is reasonable; wrong-headed, intractable, self-willed' or 'perverse' (*OED*).

In the 1920s, Machen wrote *The London Adventure; or, The Art of Wandering,* the sub-title proposing that books on the city must act like perambulations, subject to chance, wrong-turns and disorientation, a willingness to get lost, and so become open to moments of deliverance and joy – 'the magic touch which redeems and exalts the dullness of things' surprised from 'unknown, unvisited squares' or 'railway arches.'[33] The possibility of levering open other realities in the mundane world by stumbling across them drives a number of Machen's short fictions, such as 'A Fragment of Life' (1904) or, much later, 'N' (1936). This tactic, elevated to the *dérive* or 'drift' by the Parisian avant-gardists The Situationist International a generation later, makes the wayward traversal of the city an act of resistance.[34]

The waywardness of the weird is also a matter of the slipperiness of form, a refusal to fit narrative or generic expectation. In his eccentric theory of literature, Nicholas Royle places *veering* as central to it, 'responding to what is on the move and uncertain in the very moment of reading, to what is slippery, unpredictable and chancy in the experience of literature.'[35] Royle associates 'turning, sliding and shifting' as the mark of the literary in general, but the waywardness of the veer can be another way to capture the weird tale.[36] This veering effect explains how weird fiction expands beyond the expected orbit of Gothic writers. It means writers like Rudyard Kipling, Walter de la Mare, William Samson, Daphne du Maurier, or Robert Aickman, or more recently the meta-generic play of Kelly Link, George Saunders or Jonathan Lethem could be considered to veer across the weird terrain, precisely for the way that they slide in and out of generic conventions.[37].

The fiction of Kelly Link is exemplary in this respect. Link, who has so far only written short fiction, was considered unpublishable by mainstream literary publishers and so she founded her own press, Small Beer. Since her first collection, *Stranger Things Happen* (2001), her work has been lauded by many different kinds of readership. It is a hopeless task to try to fix the terrain these fictions occupy if using static or bounded generic definitions. There are recognisable stubs from ghost stories, from Gothic fiction, from fairy tales, from science fiction and fantasy, but these are offered in the tone of kooky, ramshackle fabulations, full of knowing metafictional nudges, and which never stay in the same furrow but veer wildly from section to section, paragraph to paragraph, and sometimes even sentence to sentence. Her tactic is frequently one of a

violent collision of horizons of expectation, hurling together, say, traumatic teen angst realism but set in a hotel where a convention of bored superheroes are auditioning for new sidekicks ('Secret Identity'). Link alternates disconnected generic strands in the same story ('Pretty Monsters'), and repeatedly experiments with 'impossible' focalisations, such as the posthumous narrators of 'Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose' or 'The Specialist's Hat'.[38] There is something more than whimsical 'magical realism' at work in Link's stories: these aggressively target the 'suspension of disbelief' despite their apparent whimsy, foregrounding the ontological insecurity inherent in any fabulation by constant, disconcerting acts of veering. Gary Wolfe identifies this kind of work as 'recombinant genre fiction: stories which effectively decompose and reconstitute genre materials and techniques, together with materials and techniques from a variety of literary traditions, even including the traditions of domestic realism.'[39]

The weird does necessarily need the apparatus of horror, then: it can manifest in a waywardness that leaves the reader confounded at the slow mutation of the story out of one horizon of expectation and into another. This is not just a 'postmodern' turn, for Kipling's most bewildering tales – 'Mary Postgate' or 'At the End of the Passage' – also twist gently beyond grasp, sliding out of Chekhovian realism and into Gothic horror or scientific romance, requiring multiple readings before the reader understands that they remain deliberately fractured and enigmatic.

Another way to understand this veering of the weird is to think about it as a mode that offers a formal rendition of *perversity,* understood as a twisting away

from heteronormative destinations. When tracing a trajectory out of Lovecraft's horror, it becomes legitimate to ask: Is the weird mainly a male mode of sexual anxiety about the weird sisters who determine man's fate? Does it share the conservative trope of the 'monstrous feminine' Barbara Creed identifies running through contemporary horror film?[40] Lovecraft's sexual terror – most overt in 'The Dunwich Horror' – is part and parcel of his discourse of panic at modernity. Sexual disgust motors much of Robert Aickman's output, too. In the recent revival, M. John Harrison's fiction often features women characters that suffer wasting diseases, collapsing in decay at the touch of entropic male self-pity. This is at its most overt in his extraordinary story, 'Running Down', an apocalyptic vision of England's post-war decline.[41]

Yet it is entirely possible to veer from this account and take another trajectory from the fin-de-siècle to the present day in which women writers occupy the centre of weird fiction. We could start with Vernon Lee's *Hauntings* (1890), a Decadent collection that eschews conventionalized Gothic tropes for psychology and wayward turns of plot. The pioneer Modernist of stream-of-consciousness, May Sinclair, published *Uncanny Tales* in 1923, stories that emerge from the overlapping terrains of psychoanalysis, mysticism and psychical research.[42] At mid-century, the most successful writers of weird tales were Shirley Jackson in America and Daphne du Maurier in England. Both are sidelined because the weird connoisseur despises middlebrow success most of all, and yet there is, Nina Auerbach suggests, a 'defining weirdness' about du Maurier that the domestication of her as 'author of *Rebecca'* eclipses.[43] Cruel twists of desire abound from du Maurier's earliest short stories, which have been interpreted

within Gothic frame.[44] Eventually, though, we return to the strangeness Venice in du Maurier's 'Don't Look Now', of wandering waywardly and getting lost in a city of ghosts, where weird sisters spy the dead child and foresee the husband's death even as he tries to fend off their unnerving mannish oddity and psychical powers. Du Maurier's code-word for her same-sex desires was her 'Venetian' mood ('I glory in my Venice, when I am in a Venice mood' she wrote to one lover).[45] It allows one to reflect that this whole female lineage tracked through the weird here is also 'lesbian' one, although many of the writers would have refused the identification.

This ability to sketch out a wholly other trajectory reconfirms that the weird is a labyrinthine mode rather than an easily definable genre. The weird can veer in the sense of exemplifying a *queer errancy,* a 'literal and figurative errancy, which allows them to move in and out of closed spaces and ways of thinking.'[46]

~~Uncanny~~ No More

The weird exists '*in breach',* to borrow a concept from Miéville's novel, *The City & The City* (2009) – it inheres in perversity or transgression. It twists or veers away from familiar frames and binary distributions. In an important way, this means that it is not reducible to the Gothic's economy of the uncanny or its compulsion to repeat. For Freud, the *unheimlich* was coiled inside the *Heimlich,* making the uncanny 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.'[47] The uncanny is a series of displacements that always leads back to the ultimate familiar home: the womb. The interpretive machinery of the uncanny thus inherently domesticates. In contrast, the monstrous breaches of

the weird do not return us to something familiar but repressed, but instead veers away to invoke a dread that is irreducible, that cannot be reductively interpreted, translated or returned. Lovecraft spoke of the 'really weird' as 'a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim.'[48] Allegory is busted; the majestic failure of the Kantian sublime broken off, tumbling back to earth, so that the weird 'allows swillage of that awe and horror from "beyond" back into the everyday – into angles, bushes, the touch of strange limbs, noises, etc. The weird is a radicalised sublime backwash.'[49]

To define the unease evoked by the weird requires new terminologies beyond the domesticated uncanny. Miéville's *abcanny* runs strategic interference on the Gothic's favoured term, moving it from simple inversion to odd mutation, aiming as he puts it, 'to en-Weird ontology itself.' [50] Mark Fisher prefers to evoke the 'eerie', those strange conditions of unnerving absence or quiescence where agency is uncertain: 'The eerie only persists so long as the status of the agent is unresolved. Is there any agency here at all? And if there is some intent, is it malign?'[51] The eerie has since been picked up by Robert MacFarlane as a defining tone in contemporary English 'occulture', 'a magnificent mash-up of hauntology, geological sentience and political activism'.[52]

Kierkegaard's concept of dread also proves rich in possibility. The Gothic is burdened by the nightmare of history and the doom of repetition, but dread is anticipatory, oriented towards the future, what Kierkegaard calls 'the dizziness

of freedom', an abyss from 'freedom gazes down into its own possibility.' 'The nothing of dread is a complex of presentiments,' he continues, 'coming nearer and nearer to the individual.'[53] Dread is without object, only the foreboding of an encounter that might be our undoing, the dissolution of boundaries. Again, dread is not about recurrence or return, the compulsion to repeat, but 'the surplus value of fear: the accursed share of fear that cannot be reduced.'[54]

To begin to grasp weird fiction is to orient away from the uncanny, then, to *disorient* it in the twist of the abcanny and the other distorted affects that lie beyond. This breach of conventional conceptual frameworks perhaps accounts for the way weird fiction has also become a privileged area of the non-philosophy (to use Francois Laruelle's term) of 'weird' or 'speculative' realism, in which writers like Eugene Thacker and Graham Harvey use Lovecraft and cosmic horror to challenge the metaphysics of Kant or the phenomenology of Husserl.[55] Speculative Realism has emerged from two distinct (and incompatible) strands of thought. The first is inspired by Nick Land's apocalyptic theory-fictions that commenced with *The Thirst for Annihilation,* an anti-book that aimed 'to awaken the monster in the basement of reason' and declared war on the philosophical tradition.[56] Land went on to write texts like 'CyberGothic' and 'The Origins of the Cthulhu Club', which used science fiction and horror as texts to be inhabited and animated rather than subject to commentary.[57] It produced a line of writing embracing nihilism and venerating Lovecraft's materialism and cosmic indifferentism, hovering in the borderzones of philosophy, anti-capitalist rant, horror fiction and conspiracy theory, all delivered in the deadpan apocalyptic tone patented by Jean Baudrillard. Typically in this field, a study like Ray

Brassier's *Nihil Unbound* has fed back into weird fiction itself, becoming inspiration for Thomas Ligotti's virulently pessimistic fictions of horror and its philosophy that he sketches out in *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race.*[58] Cosmic horror in this mode is continually held to represent 'the moment of frozen thought, the enigmatic stillness of everything except the furtive, lurking revelation of a limit.'[59]

The second strand is less adolescent, but equally provoking, deriving from Bruno Latour's challenge to the way he claims modernity has divided the world between subjects and objects. Latour instead proposes a world of 'risky attachments' and 'tangled objects.' Rather like Bill Brown's call for 'Thing Theory', which refuses to subsume things into the asymmetrical power of the subject-object relation, Latour speaks of new entanglements that have 'no clear boundaries, no well-defined essences, no sharp separation between their own hard kernel and their environment.'[60] Instead, using a language that starts to evoke the chimerae of the weird, Latour calls up 'numerous connections, tentacles, and pseudopods that link them in many different ways.'[61] This mode is less enamoured of pessimism, considering the weird as a place for potentially radical disarticulations and reformulations of traditional binaries, starting with self and other, subject and object. Horror dethrones the subject: this is its gift to object-oriented philosophy. But we are not always in the terrain of panic and disgust, of reactive horror, since the hybrid imbroglios envisaged by writers like Octavia Butler in her *Xenogenesis* books or China Miéville in his sprawling Bas-Lag trilogy, are texts that spawn *promising monsters*.[62]

Perhaps this is why the signature of weird fiction and horror film is not the vampire or the zombie, those minimal allegorical displacements of the human, but the tentacle, that limb-tongue suggestive of absolute alterity. Arthur Machen's 'The Novel of the Black Seal' involves an evolutionary throwback with the ability to extend slimy pseudopodia; William Hope Hodgson's sea stories like *The Boats of 'Glen Garrig'* crawled with monstrous mosaic beings that fuse together men and rotting clumps of seaweed or fungus. The height of Lovecraft's phobic response was to feelers, the antennulae of crustacea or the formless touch of the tentacle. Contemporary horror, from *The Thing* and *The Fly* to the creatures of *The Mist* or *The Host* exploit human disgust at formless, structureless, primordial ooze, the *slime dynamics* that invoke the arche-origins of life itself, a chaos of protozoan mass that dissolves all boundary.[63] This is materialist, biological terror rather than anything rooted in theological conceptions: the weird begins with a truly Darwinian traumatism, but can end up in a passionate clutch with the undirectedness of non-teleological evolution. In New Weird writing, the fungal, mycological drive continues (it is there in VanderMeer's stories set in Ambergris or in Aliya Whiteley's unnerving novella, *The Beauty*), but the alterity tends to be embraced in unexpected ways. Cephalopodal politics has been key in Miéville's writing (including a fan-boy visit to the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole), this obsession played out in almost self-mocking terms in his jaunty octopodal apocalypse, *Kraken* (2010).[64]

The octopus, Vilem Flusser theorizes earnestly in his monograph *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis,* bewilders the human through its insistent inversions. It moved *down* into the unknown, benthic depths of the water, whilst humans moved *up* and out.

Octopus morphology is built on the spiral rather than bilateral symmetry, its head grows out of its foot, its brain is borne lower than its stomach. 'In that we deny our biological condition from opposed sides, we deny one another.'[65] The mythic resonances of giant squids and krakens, the unknowability of the cephalopod (with a biology that still perplexes scientists in many respects), makes it a privileged locus of animal existence that 'refuses to be conceptualized', as Derrida puts it in *The Animal That Therefore I Am.* It cannot be swept into the neutralizing economy of self-other. When the giant eye of the cephalopod stares back, this is 'the abysmal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the *border crossing* from which vantage men dares to announce himself to himself.'[66] In more recent philosophical terms, the tentacle is the emblem of that which will not *correlate,* be reduced to categories of human thought.[67] The weird's horror is focused on finding and pressing hard on this limit, which constitutes another twist or veer from the kinds of taxonomies we also use to categorize fictions.

Border/Zones

Introductions draw out a boundary, mark thresholds; an orientation provides a route map through the territory thus delineated. What to do with a genre whose principal purpose seems to be the undoing of these gestures? Jacques Derrida once suggested that if the law of genre is to separate, to purify – there is a secret law, 'lodged within the heart of the law itself' that is 'a law of impurity or a principle of contamination.'[68] It is as if the weird *thematizes* this secret law of the law at every level: it is a fiction of strange zones and borderscapes, its monsters

boundary-crawlers that slime all over generic quarantines, making borders less lines of separation than promiscuous contact zones.

Arthur Machen imagined temporal portals in clumps of ancient forest in the English/Welsh borderlands or in urban spaces found once in London but never rediscovered. For William Hope Hodgson, the Sargasso Sea was a suspensive zone where biologies horrifyingly intermixed. He also published *The House on the Borderland,* where a house on the edges of colonial Ireland hides a portal into other cosmic dimensions. Lovecraft found baneful influences in cut-off villages or remote valleys where the law of nature is perverted by unknowable obtrusions, a trick repeated in tales by Blackwood or Aickman.

Perhaps the biggest influence on writers of the New Weird is the novel *Roadside Picnic* by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (1972; translated from the Russian in 1977). In this enigmatic book, the Zone is a forbidden site, full of detritus left by an extra-terrestrial race. The black-market in artefacts supports huge leaps in technology and is fed by a group of traders called Stalkers who are prepared to risk entering the Zone. The things they retrieve make no sense; no one knows how they work, or why, as they violate every principle of physics. It is called *Roadside Picnic,* because a character speculates this material is the garbage left behind after an alien stopover on Earth on the way to somewhere much more interesting. The geography of the Zone morphs oddly and with deathly effect. Stalkers suffer wasting diseases, and peculiar effects develop in the communities that exist near the Zone. If people try to leave the area, they seem to take something of the Zone with them, and those who enter the Zone suffer

unpredictable effects too: 'Everyone who spends enough time with the Zone undergoes changes, both of phenotype and genotype … You know what kind of children stalkers can have and you know what happens to the stalkers themselves. Why? Where is the mutation factor?'[69]

A quote from *Roadside Picnic* is the first epigraph to M. John Harrison's novel *Nova Swing* (2006). This novel, the middle panel in the Empty Space trilogy, features incomprehensible technologies that emerge from a zone called the Kefahuchi Tract. In the first book, *Light* (2002), the Tract is an impenetrable limit from which seemingly no one has returned. All that is left at its edges are mad technologies and bizarre engineering, testament to millennia of obsession with the Tract by everyone that comes across it. In *Nova Swing,* a part of the Tract has collapsed onto a planet, creating a zone where traders navigate a shifting, incomprehensible space. 'They died in numbers,' the narrator states, 'of odd diseases or inexplicable accidents inside and outside the site, leaving wills too exuberant to understand and last testaments tattooed on their buttocks. These treasure maps, whose psychic north pegged itself to equally unreliable features of the Kefahuchi Tract in the night sky above, always proved worthless.'[70]

Roadside Picnic also clearly inspired Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach trilogy (*Annihilation, Authority* and *Acceptance,* all 2014), which features an anomalous zone, Area X, which swallows a terrain of grassland, lighthouse and beach in Florida. It seems to be protected by an impenetrable border, policed by a secret government agency, and expeditions sent into the interior through the sole portal all come undone in weird and unpredictable ways, the few that return no

longer quite themselves (or not themselves at all, perhaps, but fuzzy copies of themselves replicated by something wholly other). The border proves strangely variable, too, creating an expansive borderzone of uncertain limits, where natural law and meaningful human structures of authority are subtly undermined. Area X is an *extraterritorial* borderland, one of those growing spaces in the contemporary world, Matthew Hart suggests, where 'borders between territories do not represent the edges of Euclidean geopolitical planes, but ought, rather, to be considered as three-dimensional volumes … in which the space of the border has proliferated and become distended, appearing not merely at the edges of territories but within and without.'[71] At the core of this space is the Crawler, a fantastical chimerical beast, half-human, half-slug, that is perhaps writing the very text we read.

The focus of weird writing on unnerving edgelands – one could look at Andrew Hurley's malign coastline in *The Loney* (2014) ,or the shifting ontological status of the Cornish fishing village in Wyl Menmuir's *The Many* (2016), or Brian Catling's memory-eating forest in *The Vorrh* (2015) – suggests that it is a fiction that is not so much an ecological literature as a form peculiarly suited to addressing the hybrid world of the Anthropocene. This is the term that was polemically coined in 2000 to name the largely detrimental effects of human development on Nature and the fate of the planet, now so irreversible and substantial as perhaps to inaugurate a new geological epoch.[72] Modernity trained human subjects to dominate natural objects. The Anthropocene arrives when this disastrous tactic has defeated itself, the earth becoming an actor again, pushing back against human development, and where humanity has to learn

before it is too late 'to share agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy.'[73] Timothy Morton's *Dark Ecology* brings these terms together with a sustained reflection on the weird. Morton argues that 'ecological awareness is weird: it has a twisted, looping form' because this conceptualizes how the natural and the cultural have collapsed back into each other: 'The Anthropocene brings together human history and geological time in a strange loop, weirdly weird.'[74]

No wonder that there are lots of weird fictions that focus on malignant stirrings of ancient things long buried in the earth, of nature that refuses the role of passive object, but bites back – hard but with eerie, occluded intent. Borders that refuse to act like simple lines but become multiple and mobile volumes are typical of the weird, but also speak to a contemporary era of globalization where borders 'are often subject to shifting and unpredictable patterns of mobility and overlapping, appearing and disappearing.'[75] The strange territorial elasticity of borderscapes, dramatized in VanderMeer's Southern Reach trilogy, or in the desolated territories on either side of the wall in Gareth Edwards' film *Monsters* (2010), is signature weird. These mobile borders create temporary heterotopic zones – extraterritorialities that are also intraterritorialities – that offer glimpses of alternate orders that are neither quite utopian nor dystopian but instead suggest a weirded interstitial alterity. Andrew Thacker has defined the heterotopia as 'a sense of *movement* between the real and the unreal; it is thus a site defined by a process, the stress being upon the fact that it contests another site'[76] – another formulation that is helpful in working towards a definition of the weird.

Perhaps this essay has taken too wayward a course, scampering too quickly over open ground, slipping through borders without the proper papers. But this is only to follow the strange network of associations the actor 'Weird' creates. We have reached a kind of extraterritorial Area X that mobilizes boundaries, spins the compass, dethrones the human, hybridizes taxonomic categories, and bewilderingly shifts beyond any static cartographic plan. Your dis/orientation is complete: Welcome to the Weird.

Many thanks to audiences at King's College London and Columbia University, and particularly Rhys Williams and Matt Hart, for their comments on earlier versions of this essay.

NOTES

[1] See, for example, the reissued D. Thin (ed.), *Shadows of Carcosa: Tales of Cosmic Horror* (New York: NYRB Press, 2015) and William Sloane, *The Rim of Morning: Two Tales of Cosmic Horror* (New York: NYRB Press, 2015).

[2] Michael Ewins, 'There are no Waves, there Is only the Sea', liner notes for Second Run DVD release of Yorgos Lanthimos, *Kinetta* (2015).

[3] Anthony M Rud, 'Ooze' (1923), reprinted in Peter Haining (ed.), *Weird Tales* (London: Xanadu, 1990), 248-63, p. 259.

[4] 'The Eyrie' (letters page), *Weird Tales* (June 1926), p. 357.

[5] H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine,* ed. S. Arata (New York: Norton,), p. 59. CHECK

[6] See Robert Kenneth Jones, *The Shudder Pulps: A History of the Weird Menace Magazines of the 1930s* (West Linn, OR: FAX Collectors' Editions, 1975).

[7] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (NY: Dover, 1973), p. 15.

[8] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror,* p. 15.

[9] Lovecraft, "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction", http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/nwwf.aspx

[10] Edmund Wilson, 'Tales of the Marvellous and Ridiculous', *Classics and Commercials: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties* (London: Allen, 1951), p. 288.

[11] See Gary Lachman, *Turn off your Mind: The Mystic Sixties and the Dark Side of the Age of Aquarius* (London: Sidgwick, 2001). For Lovecraft religions, see Victorian Nelson, *Gothicka: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[12] See my 'Trouble in Lovecraft Country', *Public Books* (1 July 2016), http://www.publicbooks.org/fiction/trouble-in-lovecraft-country

[13] Harrison, 'New Weird Discussions: The Creation of a Term', in Jeff and Ann VanderMeer (eds), *The New Weird* (San Francisco: Tachyon Press, 2008), p. 317.

[14] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[15] Veronica Hollinger, 'Genre vs. Mode' in R. Latham (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 140.

[16] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. 3.

[17] Mieville 'Afterweird: The Efficacy of a Worm-Eaten Dictionary', in J. and A. VanderMeer (eds), *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories* (London: Corvus, 2011), p. 1115.

[18] Iain Sinclair, *Our Unknown Everywhere: Arthur Machen as Presence* (Newport: Three Impostors, 2013), pp. 9, 12 and 20.

[19] For context, see Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[20] See M. Berruti, S. T. Joshi, and Sam Gafford (eds), *William Hope Hodgson: Voices from the Borderland: Seven Decades of Criticism on the Master of Cosmic Horror* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2014) and Minna Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015).

[21] M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), p. 33.

[22] The *Sertum* appears in James's 1904 story, 'The Treasure of Abbot Thomas' and the Tractate Middoth in the story of the same name. All stories referred to here are in M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories,* ed. D. Jones (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2011).

[23] See Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magical Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[24] Lovecraft, Letter to Willis Conover, 29 July 1936, *Selected Letters* V, p. 285 and p. 287.

[25] Carolyn Caywood, 'The Book Whose Reputation Preceded It', *School Library Journal* (Nov 1993), p. 48.

[26] Caywood, p. 48.

[27] See Phil Hine, *The Pseudonomicon* (Temple, AZ: Falcon, 2004).

[28] Caywood, p. 48.

[29] Leif Sorensen, 'A Weird Modernist Archive: Pulp Fiction, Pseudobiblia, H. P. Lovecraft', *Modernism/Modernity* 17:3 (2010), pp. 518 and 506.

[30] See Jacques Derrida, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', *Diacritics* 25: 2 (1995).

[31] Bloch's story is collected in *The Best of Robert Bloch* (New York: Del Rey, 1977). For Samuels, see *The Man Who Collected Machen and Other Weird Tales* (Chomu Press, 2011).

[32] Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 5.

[33] Arthur Machen, *The London Adventure; or, The Art of Wandering* (London: Martin Secker, 1924), p. 48 and p. 11.

[34] See Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

[35] Nicholas Royle, *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. viii.

[36] Royle, *Veering,* p. 28.

[37] For more detailed close readings of Rudyard Kipling, William Samson and Robert Aickman see my 'Weird Stories: The Potency of Horror and Fantasy' in D. Head (ed.), *Cambridge History of the English Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 447-63.

[38] For 'Secret Identity', see *Get in Trouble* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2016). For 'Pretty Monsters', see *Pretty Monsters* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2010). For 'Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose' and 'The Specialist's Hat', see *Stranger Things Happen* (Easthampton, MA: Small Beer Press, 2001).

[39] Gary K. Wolfe, 'Malebolge, or the Ordnance of Genre', *Conjunctions* 39 (2002), 405-19, p. 415.

[40] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film Feminism Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[41] See Mark Bould, 'Old, Mean and Misanthropic: An Interview with M. John Harrison', in *Parietal Games: Critical Writings By and On M. John Harrison,* ed. M. Bould and M. Reid (London: Foundation Studies in Science Fiction, 2005), pp. 326-41.

[42] For more detailed commentary on Lee and Sinclair, see my *The Invention of Telepathy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[43] Nina Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier: Haunted Heiress* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 127.

[44] See Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, *Daphne Du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

[45] Cited Auerbach, *Du Maurier,* p. 157.

[46] Anne E. Duggan, *Queer Enchantments: Gender, Sexuality, and Class in the Fairy Tale Cinema of Jacques Demy* (Detroit: Wesleyan State University, 2013), p. 93.

[47] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', *Penguin Freud Library,* vol 14 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 340.

[48] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror,* p. 16.

[49] China Miéville, 'Weird Fiction', in M. Bould et al (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 511.

[50] China Miéville, 'M. R. James and the Quantum Vampire: Weird; Hauntological: Versus and/or and and/or or?', *Collapse IV* (2008), p. 113.

[51] Mark Fisher, 'Eerie Thanatos: Nigel Kneale and the Dark Enlightenment', in S. S. Sandhu (ed.), *The Twilight Language of Nigel Kneale* (New York: Texte und Tone, 2012), p. 110.

[52] Robert MacFarlane, 'The Eeriness of the English Countryside', *Guardian* (10 April 2015), http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/10/eeriness-english-countryside-robert-macfarlane

[53] Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread,* trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 55.

[54] Miéville, 'The Surplus Value of Fear', in J. Van't Zelfde (ed), *Dread: The Dizziness of Freedom* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2013), p. 58.

[55] See Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet: The Horror of Philosophy Vol I* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011) and Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2012).

[56] Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. xiv.

[57] See Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007* (Plymouth: Urbanomic, 2012).

[58] Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007). Thomas Ligotti, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2010), with an introduction by Brassier.

[59] Eugene Thacker, *Tentacles Longer Than Night: Horror of Philosophy Vol 3* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2015), p. 111.

[60] Bruno Latour, *The Politics of Nature: How to Bring Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 22. Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry* 28: 1 (2001), pp. 1-22.

[61] Latour, *Politics of Nature,* p. 24.

[62] Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy is *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1988), reissued together as *Lilith's Brood* (2000). It concerns the politics of human-alien hybridization. Mieville's Bas-Lag books are *Perdido Street Station* (2000), *The Scar* (2002) and *Iron Council* (2004). The phrase 'promising monsters' evokes Donna Haraway's injunction to embrace the unforeseen potentialities of hybridization in 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others' in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, P. A. Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies* (New York; Routledge, 1992) , pp. 295-337.

[63] See Ben Woodard, *Slime Dynamics: Generation, Mutation, and the Creep of Life* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2012).

[64] See Jeff VanderMeer, *City of Saints and Madmen* (London: Tor, 2004), Aliya Whiteley, *The Beauty* (London: Red Squirrel, 2014), China Miéville, 'Alien Evasion', *Arc* 1: 1 (2012), 33-9 and *Kraken* (London: Macmillan, 2010).

[65] Vilem Flusser and Louis Bec, *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis: A Treatise,* trans. V. A. Pakis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 26.

[66] Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am,* trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 9 and p. 12.

[67] Anti-correlationism is central to the work of Quentin Meillassoux, and picked up by speculative realism. For commentary, see Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of*

Things: On Speculative Realism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

[68] Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', trans. Avital Ronnell, *Gylph* 7 (1980), p. 204.

[69] Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic,* trans. Antonina W Bouis (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 108-9.

[70] M John Harrison, *Nova Swing* (London: Gollancz, 2006), p. 116.

[71] Matthew Hart, 'Threshold to the Kingdom: The Airport is a Border and the Border is a Volume', *Criticism* 57: 2 (2015), 173-89, p. 177. See also M. Amir and R. Sela, *Extraterritorialities in Occupied Worlds* (New York: Punctum Books, 2016).

[72] The Anthropocene was coined by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000. For discussion, see Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2014).

[73] Bruno Latour, 'Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene', *New Literary History* 45 (2014), p. 5.

[74] Morton, *Dark Ecology,* p. 7 and p. 8.

[75] Sandro Mezzarda and Brett Nelson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labour* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 6.

[76] Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 25.